DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 236 CS 213 274

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TITLE Formative Evaluation of the Westport Communications/Writing Magnet Middle School 1990-1991.
INSTITUTION Kansas City School District, Mo.
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 26p.; Product of the Evaluation Office.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Skills; Educational Research; Junior High Schools; Language Arts; *Magnet Schools; *Middle Schools; *Program Evaluation; *Writing (Composition)
IDENTIFIERS *Kansas City Public Schools MO

ABSTRACT

A formative evaluation report documented the progress made by Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet during its first year of implementing the communications/writing theme. Implementation of the theme was constrained by ongoing construction and renovation, which eliminated many classrooms from use and necessitated a separate facility to provide sufficient classrooms. Also, school began without computer labs and key teaching personnel. In part due to construction, the school operated below enrollment capacity. The sixth grade was above capacity, and was the only grade to meet minority enrollment desegregation goals. Courses and activities were offered in 9 of the 11 theme strands. Half of the students neither participated in theme instruction nor expressed enjoyment of theme events. The majority of teachers were satisfied with the progress made during the first year of implementation. Teacher surveys and observational data suggest that theme access at the communications/writing middle school will be dependent on the ability of the administration and teachers to establish a stable school environment and to motivate the students. Parental response to the theme was positive, although the majority would like to see more progress in basic skills. Achievement data were below the national norms in every grade and all subtests except for non-minority sixth grade language. In theme-related subtests of reading and language arts, scores primarily of the sixth and seventh grades improved this year compared to last. (Nine tables of data are included; an appendix lists theme-related field trips and activities.) (SR)

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Formative Evaluation of the Westport Communications/Writing Magnet Middle School

1990-1991

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August 1991

Evaluation Office
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Executive Summary

The Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet completed its first year of operation as part of the Kansas City, Missouri School District's *Long-Range Magnet School Plan*. This formative evaluation report documents the progress made by Westport Middle School during the first year of implementing the communications/writing theme.

Implementation of the theme was constrained by ongoing construction of the new facility and renovations to the existing building, which eliminated many classrooms from use. A separate facility was needed (the Annex) in order to have sufficient classrooms to accommodate the number of students. Also, school began without computer labs and key teaching personnel. In part due to construction, the communications/writing middle school operated below enrollment capacity. The sixth grade was above capacity, and was the only grade to meet minority enrollment desegregation goals.

Courses and activities were offered in nine of the 11 theme strands. Half of the students did not participate in theme instruction nor expressed enjoyment of theme events. The majority of teachers were satisfied with the progress made during the first year of implementation. They believed the students enjoyed the theme and had sufficient opportunities to participate in theme-related experiences. The observational data support the availability of learning opportunities. Probable explanations for student disinterest in school were found in their feelings about the school climate. Most students did not feel safe or welcome at school. Also, very few felt the students got along well together. Discipline was cited by teachers as the area most in need of improvement. Collectively, these data suggest that theme success at the communications/writing middle school will be dependent on the ability of the administration and teachers establish a stable school environment and to motivate the students.

Parental response to the theme was positive, although the majority would like to see more progress in basic skills. The majority of parents enrolled in the communications/writing school because their child attended last year. Minority students did not meet district or national norms on the ITBS subtests in reading, language, and math. The sixth grade non-minority class exceeded the national norms on all subtests, and the seventh and eighth graders scored above the district norms in language and math. Compared to last year, scores in reading and language improved in the sixth and seventh grades. DRP instructional scores were below the district and national norms in every grade. MMAT average scale scores in English/language arts and math were below the district and state averages in every grade.

Formative Evaluation
of the
Westport Communications/Writing
Magnet Middle School

1990-1991

Introduction

Westport Middle School completed the first year of implementation of the communications/writing magnet theme as part of the *Long-Range Magnet School Plan*, hereafter referred to as the Long-Range Plan (Hale and Levine, 1986). This formative evaluation documents the progress made by Westport Middle School during the first year of implementing the communications/writing theme.

The Long-Range Plan (Hale and Levine, 1986,p. 64) established the objective of the communications/writing magnet programs as allowing "Students [to] develop critical thinking skills, speech, language, analytical skills, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills." The curriculum was designed to prepare students for college training in communication studies and eventual careers in some area of communication.

The goal of the present report is to provide decision-makers with evaluative information useful in improving program implementation.

The presentation of results is preceded by a description of the communications/writing program and a discussion of the evaluation design.

Program Description

The communications/writing program at Westport Middle School offers theme continuity to students currently enrolled in the communications/writing program at three elementary schools (Attucks, New West and Troost). The structure and composition of the magnet program at the middle school level is contained in the Long-Range Plan and the Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet Planning Outline (Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet Task Force, 1990).

Essentially, the Long-Range Plan and the Westport Middle School Planning Outline describe a three year program in communications/writing with 11 theme strands. The instruc-

tional strands are: text, creative writing/composition, dramatic arts, public speaking, journalism (print and broadcast), public/human relations, computer, commercial arts, and photography. Eighth grade students are expected to focus on a particular area of communication in preparation for the high school communications and writing magnet program. Also, the communications/writing program at the middle school level will have a strong research and applied learning orientation. Lastly, a "Communicators-in-Residence" program will embellish the academic curricula through special presentations from community resources.

Extensive renovation and construction of the Westport Middle School and surrounding area was underway throughout the 1990-1991 school year. Renovation of the facility is scheduled for completion at the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year. Renovation activities resulted in the loss of several classrooms which required some classes to convene at a separate facility (Westport Middle School Annex, or the Annex). The Annex contained theme and core courses for eighth grade students.

Evaluation Design

Questions addressed in this first year formative evaluation were:

1. Has the school met established enrollment goals?
2. Was the program implemented as detailed in the *Long-Range Magnet School Plan* and in the Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet Planning Outline?
3. What are parent, student, teacher, and school leadership perceptions about and attitudes toward the program?
4. What are the levels of student achievement in the school?

The evaluation is facilitated through classroom observations and site visits, perception data gathered through interviews and survey instruments, and through data obtained from the district's research and testing office.

Results

Demographic Data

Enrollment and racial composition data are presented for the first year of magnet school operations plus the year prior to implementing the communications/writing magnet program. The year prior (1989-1990) is treated as the baseline year and gives perspective to the magnet year data. Minority and non-minority enrollment are reported by grade. All demographic data

for the communications/writing middle school were extracted from the official student membership reports prepared by the research office of the school district.

Table 1 presents the enrollment capacity for the communications/writing magnet program. The sixth grade operated well above capacity, but seventh and eighth grades were well below capacity. The Site Task Force Planning committee did not expect to met projected enrollment figures the first year of implementation due to on-going construction and renovation (Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet Planning Outline, 1990). As anticipated by school leadership, enrollment was down 13% from 1989-1990. A goal of integration for each magnet school defined in the Long-Range Plan is a ratio of 60% minority and 40% non-minority at each grade level. Traditional schools converted to magnet schools, originally having a greater than 60% minority populations, such as Westport Middle School, are expected to move at least 2% closer to 60% minority in each grade every year.

Enrollment data for the communications/writing middle school during the first year of implementation (1990-1991), plus baseline year (1989-1990) are in Table 2. The sixth grade class was the only grade that met the court-ordered 1990-1991 desegregation goals. Minority enrollment increased in the seventh and eighth grades. This may be partly explained because the Westport Middle school students who were in the sixth and seventh grade in 1989-1990

Table 1

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet Program Capacity and Actual Capacity 1990 - 1991

Grade	Program Capacity[1]	Actual[2]	Difference	% of Capacity
Six	185	241	+ 56	130%
Seven	370	235	-135	64%
Eight	284	222	-62	78%
Total	839	698	-141	83%

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent.

1 Program capacity utilized by the Admission's Office when placing students in magnet program.

2 From *September 26, 1990 Student Membership* (Research Office, 1990).

Table 2

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Minority & Non-Minority Enrollment
1989-1990 & 1990-1991

	1989 - 1990				1990 - 1991			
	Minority		Non-Minority		Minority		Non-Minority	
Grade	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Six	234	96%	11	4%	212	88%	29	12%
Seven	268	93%	21	7%	222	94%	13	6%
Eight	241	90%	27	10%	204	92%	18	8%
Total	743	93%	59	7%	638	91%	60	9%
Grand Total		802				698		

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent. Enrollment data from *September 27, 1989 Student Membership* (Research Office, 1989) and *September 26, 1990 Student Membership* (Research Office, 1990).

were allowed to continue their middle school education in the communications/writing theme. Therefore, the success of the desegregation effort at the communications/writing middle school can be measured realistically by the minority/non-minority ratio observed in the 1990-1991 sixth grade class.

Implementation

Program implementation was evaluated from data collected through classroom observations, site visits, interviews, and administrators, and teacher questionnaires. Classrooms to observe were selected randomly at the beginning of the school year[1], and observations continued through May, 1991. Data regarding physical evidence of the theme, infusion of the theme into the basic curriculum and student activities were gathered during each observation period (approximately 45-50 minutes). The school principal, administrators and teachers were interviewed and/or surveyed twice during the year as a means of documenting leadership perceptions of program functioning and implementation.

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1 A previous program evaluator developed the observation schedule and selected classrooms for observation.

Staff and Supplies. One-third of the staff was not hired in time for summer in-service. The school year started without several staff positions filled: computer resource teacher, computer teacher, reading resource teacher, and science teacher. Also, the video teacher was working without a contract. By the end of the year, school leadership reported all staff positions filled, with the exception of the reading resource teacher. Implementation of the theme was not affected, according to school leadership, as the work was absorbed by other teachers.

School leadership learned of the need for the Annex two weeks before school began. Staffing and supply of the Annex was accomplished by utilizing the existing staff, both teachers and administrators. School leadership characterized the unexpected demands of the Annex as leaving a feeling of being "half staffed" at both the main building and the Annex throughout the year. The adverse impact of the Annex on theme implementation was perceived by school leadership as greater than that of ongoing construction.

Supplies and materials for theme and core courses were adequate, and not an issue of concern for the majority of teachers (see Teacher Perceptions).

Construction/Renovation. Construction on the Westport Middle and High Schools was ongoing throughout the year and posed a constant impediment to education and theme implementation. Currently, construction is behind schedule with progress still in Phase II when Phase III is expected. School leadership characterized the work performed prior to school opening as incomplete and poorly done. For example, classrooms that were supposed to be available the beginning of the 1990-1991 school year were not finished. As a result, classrooms were packed and it became necessary to revise instruction schedules in order to teach around the closed rooms. Also, computer labs were installed late (November 1990). Fortunately, the temporary facilities for photography and video were ready. Lastly, parking was not available at the school. Teachers either parked on nearby streets, which carried risks of its own, or were bused into school from a designated central parking site (Westport Manor Square).

School leadership stated in the end of year interview that the school population adapted well to the disruptions created by construction activities. Essentially, implementation was affected, but not considerably. The only programs curtailed by construction were TV instruction and all forms of broadcast since the studios currently are under construction.

Strands of Instruction. The communications/writing theme was implemented through nine of the eleven instructional strands during the first year. Some strands were better developed than others, such as creative writing/composition, journalism (i.e., video recording),

photography, and computer. Strands not observed in classrooms nor offered in the curriculum were dramatic arts and commercial arts. Courses offered to students in all grades during the 1990-1991 school year were: creative writing/composition, graphic arts, photography, and journalism (including video recording). The Media Resource Center provided students opportunities for hands-on learning and experience using computers, cameras and film developing equipment, and video recording.

Infusion. Although a third of teachers missed the summer in-service, infusion was successful (see Table 3). The majority of classroom observations (82%) found teachers infusing the theme into core courses. The strategy of using theme vocabulary to infuse the theme was noted in 72% of classroom observations. Teacher self-report indicated successful infusion by 82% of teachers.

Evidence of Theme. In the classrooms observed, teachers were successful in interesting and involving the students in the lesson 88% of the time. Student work was noted frequently in classrooms and throughout the building, but not as often as theme-related posters, bulletins, etc.

Among the works produced by students were a monthly newsletter, a book containing their writings, a literary magazine, and numerous video recordings of school events. The communicators-in-residence program was implemented late in the year. Residences held included

Table 3

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Building & Classroom Observations
Percent of Classroom Visits

Category	1990-1991
Physical Evidence of Theme	
Student work displayed	63%
Theme displays	75%
Classroom Observations	
Theme vocabulary displayed, used by teachers and students	72%
Teachers infused theme	82%
Students participating in lesson and engaged in lesson appropriate activity	88%

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent and denote frequency of category occurrence.

poetry, writing, story-telling, photography, and dance (see Appendix A for a complete list). Students competed in several writing contests throughout the year with one student winning the Society of Women Engineers contest. Also, a video program produced by communications/writing students was a finalist in the Panasonic KidWitness News Contest. Prior to going on a field trip, students would research the event and write a report. Field trips included several local museums, historical sites, and local theaters.

Perceptions

Student Perceptions. Approximately one-third of the english/language arts classes were selected randomly to participate in a survey of their perceptions of the magnet theme, of school, and of the relations among students and between students and teachers.

As a population, the students at the communications/writing middle school were non-committal about the magnet program (Table 4). Fifty-four percent indicated they enjoyed theme classes (item 8), 48% want to continue their education in a communications/writing high school (item 20), and 45% would recommend Westport Middle school to friends (item 25). There was some evidence that students may not have fully exploited available opportunities to participate in theme-related activities and classes, such as computer, photography, and video (see items 2 through 7, and also Teacher Perceptions for discussion). The majority of students did not find field trips to positively reinforce the theme (item 12, 72%). Other factors which may have contributed to student disinterest include not feeling safe (item 21, 64%) or welcome (item 23, 44%) at the communications/writing middle school, and discomfiting student relations (item 22, 22%). The majority of students perceived the courses as hard (item 18, 73%) and teachers challenging (item 15, 70%).

The student perception data suggest that a significant obstacle to successful theme implementation at the communications/writing middle school are the attitudes of the students enrolled. The theme did not capture the interest nor involve at least half of the students during the first year of implementation (items 5 through 13). Part of the problem may be inadequate facilities needed to implement certain strands of the theme. Yet, exploratory courses were offered in the strands surveyed in the questionnaire although hands-on activities in some courses were limited (i.e., broadcasting).

Teacher Perceptions. Teacher perceptions of the progress of magnet program implementation and school environment were gathered through a spring questionnaire. In addition to defined response categories, teachers were given the opportunity to write-in comments with

Table 4

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Student Perceptions (N = 158), Spring 1991

Statement	Yes	No
1. I am glad I go to Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet.	60%	40%
2. I am learning to use a computer.	72%	28%
3. I am learning to operate video equipment.	66%	34%
4. I am learning about photography and how to use a camera.	62%	39%
5. I am learning about radio and broadcasting.[1]	22%	78%
6. I enrolled in a graphic arts class this year.	33%	67%
7. I enrolled in a composition/journalism class this year.	31%	69%
8. I enjoy my communications/writing classes.	54%	46%
9. I have had an opportunity to participate in TV production at school.[1]	34%	66%
10. I have had an opportunity to participate in radio broadcasts at school.[1]	19%	81%
11. I have had an opportunity to give an oral presentation on a topic I researched.	43%	57%
12. The field trips helped me learn about communications/writing.	28%	72%
13. The Communicators-in-Residence is a good program.	57%	44%
14. I like to write stories, poem, etc.	64%	36%
15. The teachers challenge me to work hard.	70%	30%
16. The teachers work with me to help me understand topics being taught.	69%	31%
17. The communciations/writing classes have helped me in other subjects at school.	56%	44%
18. My classes are too easy.	27%	73%
19. I like my regular classes.	54%	46%
20. I want to continue education in communications/writing high school.	48%	53%
21. I feel safe at Westport Middle School.	37%	64%
22. Students get along well with each other.	22%	78%
23. I feelwelcome at Westport Middle School.	37%	64%
24. Students get along well with people of other races and cultures.	52%	48%
25. I would recommend Westport Middle School to friends.	45%	55%

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent.

1 Studios and broadcasting facilities were not extant during the 1990-1991 school year.

anonymity assured. Results of the questionnaire for the first year of implementation are in Table 5.

Table 5

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Teacher Perceptions (N = 65), Spring 1991

Statement	Yes	No
1. I enjoy teaching the theme.	89%	10%
2. I understand goals and objectives of the theme.	88%	8%
3. The school is implementing the theme according to goals and objectives.	82%	11%
4. The climate of the school is conducive to the theme.	45%	40%
5. I am satisfied with staff development/in-services regarding the theme.	55%	25%
6. Supplies and materials are sufficient to teach the theme.	68%	25%
7. Supplies and materials are sufficient to teach the core curriculum.	68%	14%
8. My students participated in theme-related field trips.	49%	22%
9. I am satisfied with the quality of the field trips.	60%	26%
10. The facility is adequate and meets my needs.	35%	51%
11. I am able to infuse the theme into basic curricula.	82%	3%
12. The school had planning sessions on ways to infuse the theme.	74%	6%
13. Building level administration provided support to implement the theme.	63%	23%
14. Students are making good academic progress.	49%	29%
15. Students are making good academic progress because of the theme.	43%	25%
16. The theme and regular teachers work together to implement the theme.	62%	22%
17. The students are provided with sufficient opportunities to express themselves in writing and/or through oral presentations.	89%	2%
18. The students have sufficient opportunity to use computers in composition.	52%	31%
19. The students enjoy the theme.	77%	8%
20. The theme has improved desegregation.	32%	40%
21. I feel safe teaching at Westport Middle School.	54%	19%

	Rating	Percent
22. Rating of Westport Business Technology Magnet.	Excellent	15%
	Good	36%
	Average	27%
	Fair	15%
	Poor	8%

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent. Difference from 100% in each statement represents the proportion of "no opinion" responses.

The majority of teachers were positive about the theme, their ability to implement the theme, and the students opportunities in and response to the theme. However, based upon the

results of the student survey it seems the teachers may not be in touch with student perceptions. For example, 77% of teachers felt the students enjoyed the theme (item 19, Table 5) whereas only 54% of students indicated they enjoyed the communications/writing classes (item 8, Table 4). Over half the teachers believed students had sufficient opportunity to use computers in composition (item 18, 52%), and 89% reported students were provided with opportunities to express themselves in writing and/or through oral presentations (item 17). As noted above, students perceived theme-related opportunities differently from that of their teachers. Approximately one half of the students stated they neither enrolled nor participatee in theme-related courses and activities. Observational and interview data gathered for this evaluation suggest that theme-related classes and opportunities were available, but were not exploited by half of the students. Generally, it seems the students were either frustrated by school or did not place a high value upon education. This interpretation of the data gains credence by the fact that less than half the teachers believed the students made academic progress in 1990-1991, with (item 15, 43%) or without (item 14, 49%) theme influence. Teacher comments suggested that a factor which may have contributed to the ailing educational atmosphere at the communications/writing middle school was discipline. When asked what they would like to see changed to improve the communications/writing program, the most frequent response (31%) was a better, consistent discipline policy. School leadership indicated the problem was not school-wide, but rather consisted of a core group of difficult students. Efforts were undertaken to relieve the problem and to assist teachers in ways to effectively deal with problem students.

Parent Perceptions. A random sample of 25% of parents of students attending the communications/writing middle school were given the opportunity to present their perceptions of the theme and school (see Table 6). Ethnic differences in perceptions when found are discussed in the text.

The majority of parents were satisfied with the program (item 1, 84%), the teachers (item 4, 84%), principal (item 5, 80%), and with communications from school (item 6, 86% and item 7, 89%). However, the scholastic advance of their child met with less favor, especially progress in basic skills (item 3, 47%). More non-minority parents (65%) were satisfied with their children's academic progress as compared to minority (45%). Most parents felt welcome at the communications/writing middle school (item 8, 89%). Considerably more minority parents (90%) felt welcome than non-minority (75%). A positive impact of the theme on their child was noticed by less than half the parents (item 11, 43% and item 12, 44%). These factors would

Table 6

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Parent Perceptions (N = 192), Spring 1991

Statement	Yes	No
1. I am satisfied with the communications/writing program.	84%	12%
2. I am satisfied with the progress my child has made in the communications/writing theme.	67%	24%
3. I am satisfied with the progress my child has made in basic skills.	47%	17%
4. I am satisfied with my child's teachers.	84%	10%
5. The principal is responsive to my concerns.	80%	12%
6. I am satisfied with communications from school.	86%	13%
7. Communications from school are understandable and helpful.	89%	7%
8. I feel welcome at Westport Middle School.	89%	9%
9. During this school year I attended a parent teacher conference.	63%	37%
10. During this school year I attended other meetings or school programs.	35%	65%
11. My child has talked about school more since the magnet program began.	43%	55%
12. My child has talked about school more with the magnet program in place.	44%	50%
13. Westport Middle School is clean and in good repair.	86%	7%
14. I would recommend Westport Middle School communications/writing magnet to other parents.	81%	15%
15. My child is safe at Westport Middle School.	64%	35%
16. Magnet applications are handled in a reasonable amount of time.	85%	2%
17. Student selection process is fair.[1]	65%	23%
18. Student transportation takes a reasonable amount of time.[2]	88%	9%

Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percent. Difference from 100% in a statement represents the proportion of "no opinion" responses.

1 Based on number of parents stating they know how students were selected.

2 Based on responses of parents stating their child used district transportation.

not deter 81% of parents from recommending the communications/writing middle school to other parents (item 14). Interestingly, 83% of minority and 65% of non-minority parents would recommend the school. A third of the parents chose Westport Middle School either because of the theme or because it was in the neighborhood. Half of the parents sent their child to the

communications/writing middle school because they attended last year (56% minority and 24% of non-minority parents gave this reason for enrolling their child).

Achievement

Student achievement was measured by end of the year standardized tests. For the communications/writing middle school, the tests were the reading, language, and math subtests of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the instructional level of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), and the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests (MMAT).

ITBS. ITBS results are reported for the baseline year (pre-implementation) 1989-1990 and current academic year. ITBS scores for minority and non-minority groups are reported as well as district and national norms. The percentile ranks reported are calculated from mean grade equivalent scores and indicate the relative performance of the students as compared to the 1985 national norms.

The communications/writing middle school students scored below the national norms in every grade and all subtests, except for non-minority sixth grade language (Table 7). Minority students did not meet district norms in any subtest at any grade. Non-minority sixth graders

Table 7

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Iowa Tests of Basic Skills Reading, Language, and Math
Percentile Ranks, Spring 1990 & 1991

	Reading				Language				Math			
Grade Ethnicity	1990	1991	Dist. 1991	Nat'l. Norm	1990	1991	Dist. 1991	Nat'l. Norm	1990	1991	Dist. 1991	Nat'l. Norm
Sixth												
Minority	25	26	33	50	34	36	39	50	26	26	34	50
Non-Minority	33	42			44	52			35	43		
Seventh												
Minority	29	30	38	50	37	38	43	50	24	25	34	50
Non-Minority	32	31			41	47			37	39		
Eighth												
Minority	32	33	39	50	40	39	44	50	36	28	34	50
Non-Minority	37	30			44	49			44	36		

exceeded district norms in all subtests. Non-minority seventh and eighth graders exceeded the district norms in language and math.

In theme-related subtests (reading and language), some progress was made compared to last year. All sixth grade scores improved as well as most of the seventh grade. Eighth grade scores did not advance much if any compared to last year.

DRP. The Degrees of Reading Power Test (DRP) measures reading comprehension and is used primarily as a diagnostic test to match appropriate instructional materials with a student's reading level. The test results are reported at three levels: independent, instructional, and frustration. Table 8 presents the instructional level DRP scores by grade. The corresponding national percentile rankings are provided for comparison. Every grade fell below the national percentile norm (50) and ranked below the district in the reading skills assessed by the DRP.

MMAT. Table 9 displays the results of the current year MMAT tests. Scores reported are average scale scores and can be compared to district and state averages. Neither state nor district averages were met at any grade by the communications/writing middle school students. According to the *Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests, Guide to Score Interpretation and Use* (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1990), a meaningful difference between groups exists if 25 points or more separates their scores. By this criteria, when compared to the state, communications/writing middle school students were weak in English/language arts and math. Comparing communications/writing middle school students to the district, meaningful weaknesses occurred in all grades for English/language arts and in seventh grade math.

Table 8

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing
Degrees of Reading Power,1991

	Mean DRP Score		Percentile Rank	
Grade	Westport	District	Westport	District
Sixth (N = 196)	50	51	24	26
Seventh (N = 153)	53	57	25	35
Eighth (N = 172)	59	60	31	33

Note: Mean scores reported are at the instructional level.

Table 9

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet
Missouri Mastery & Achievement Tests Average Scale Scores
Spring 1991

	English/Langauge Arts			Math		
Grade	Westport	District	State	Westport	District	State
Sixth	197	225	296	244	267	347
Seventh	227	269	299	225	274	313
Math	244	272	318	253	270	331

Summary and Recommendations

Westport Middle School Communications/Writing Magnet has completed the first year of implementation. Construction of the new facility and renovation of the old continued throughout the year. The theme was incompletely implemented during the first year as (1) some facilities (*e.g.*, broadcast studios) were under construction, (2) needed classrooms were not available at the beginning of the school year, (3) an Annex was required necessitating last minute splitting of staff, resources and students, (4) computer labs were not installed by the beginning of school as scheduled, (5) one-third of the staff were not hired in time for relevant summer in-service programs, and (6) several theme-related staff positions were not filled until later in the year.

The communications/writing middle school operated 17% below capacity. Much of the failure to meet capacity goals can be attributed to ongoing construction. The sixth grade was the only class to function above capacity and to meet the 1990-1991 court-ordered desegregation goals. Minority enrollment increased in the seventh and eighth grades.

School leadership stated that construction was bothersome, but the staff and students adapted well to the disruption. Other than those strands that required special facilities, school leadership thought that theme implementation was not considerably affected. Nine of the 11 instructional strands were implemented during the first year, particularly composition/creative writing, journalism (including video recording), photography and computer. However, at least half of the students did not take full advantage of the theme curriculum and opportunities in theme activities. Only 54% stated they enjoyed the communications/writing classes, and 45% would recommend the school to their friends. Teachers, administration and observational data

indicated that sufficient opportunities to learn and participate in the theme were afforded to the students. Responses to the student and teacher questionnaires revealed several factors which may have contributed to student disinterest. These were: (1) the majority of students did not feel safe or welcome in school, (2) a very small percent of students felt that students got along well with one another, (3) most students thought school was hard, and (4) discipline was a problem expressed by a majority of teachers.

Parent perceptions of the school, magnet program, and staff were favorable. Less than half of the parents were satisfied with the progress of their child in basic skills, however. Half of the parents sent their child to the communications/writing middle school because they attended last year.

ITBS achievement data were below the national norms in every grade and all subtests (reading, language, and math), except for non-minority sixth grade language. Minorities did not meed district norms in any subtest at any grade. Non-minority sixth graders scored above the district norms in all subtests. Non-minority seventh and eighth graders scored above the district norms in language and math. In theme-related subtests of reading and language arts, scores primarily of the sixth and seventh grades improved this year compared to last. On the DRP instructional level test, each grade scored below the district norms. Results of the MMAT tests in English/language arts and math were below the district and state averages in every grade. The differences between communications/writing middle school students and the state were meaningful.

Based upon the evidence gathered for this formative evaluation, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The issue of student safety and sense of well-being while at school needs to be addressed by school administration and teachers. Consideration of student-student relations should be included in the discussions. The majority of students indicated they did not feel safe or welcome at Westport Middle School communications/writing magnet. Only 22% felt they got along well with other students. Such feelings of discomfort have an adverse impact on education, and these impacts were observed at the communications/writing middle school.

2. Devise strategies to increase student interest and involvement in their education and in the communications/writing theme. It is recognized that this problem is not just one of education. Yet, effective resolution of the first recommendation should enhance the learning environment and allow students to concentrate more on learning. Clever teaching techniques would propagate pleasing educational experiences and perhaps create a desire to learn in some students.

3. Define and execute a discipline policy appropriate to the communications/writing middle school at Westport. An issue of concern of many teachers was the lack of a consistent, enforced discipline policy.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to recognize the staff of program evaluator assistants and clerical specialists of the Evaluation Department. Their professionalism and perseverance in data collection, data entry, and publication management were invaluable in the completion of this evaluation report.

Appendix A

Theme-Related Activities and Field Trips
1990-1991

Appendix A

Westport Middle School
Communications/Writing Magnet
Theme-Related Activities and Field Trips
1990-1991

Special Projects

Health Fair
Project Star
Royals and Star
Letters to President Bush and Congressman Wheat
Eighth Grade Missouri Writing Assessment
Alvin Ailey Writing Workshops and Summer Camp
"No Tardy" Program
KCMSD Recruitment Fair

Writing Contests

Society of Women Engineers - Monica Perez, winner
Panasonic KidWitness News Contest (Finalist)
Kindest Kansas Citian
Say No To Drugs

Programs

Rotary Partnership
United Minority Media Association
Polsinelli, White, Vardeman & Shalton Law Firm
Math Counts
STOP
LULAC
Project Business
Youthnet
National Science Program
Missouri Park Producers Program

Communicators-in-Residence

Bridget Steward: printmaking and graphic arts
Frank Higgins: poetry writing
Judi Geerkellas: silk screens and graphic arts
Leiola Reeder Howard: photography
John Anderson: speech communications
Randy Barron: dance as communication
Jack Lightfoot: jazz as communication
Tracy Milsap: storytelling
Africa in Motion: "Talking Drums"
Harmony Storytellers
Danny Cox
Charlie Parker Ensemble
Great American Indian Dancers

Field Trips

Alvin Ailey Dance Company
Jefferson City (Principal's Honor Roll)
Theater for Young Americans
Physics Day at Worlds of Fun
Historical Tour, St. Joseph, MO.
Kansas City Museum
Folly Theater
Coterie Theater
Nelson Atkins Museum
Planetarium
Foreign Language Fair
Main Library

Community Recognition

American Heart Association Certificate of Achievement for Outstanding Service in Advancing Cardiovascular Health
Civic Achievement Award (Close-Up Foundation)

Awards

Monica Perez, winner, Society of Women Engineers Contest
Finalist, Panasonic KidWitness News Contest (video)
Grant, Artist-in-Residence Program (1991-1992)